Turbanator Genesis: Namdhari on Rise

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Turbanator Genesis: Namdhari on Rise

By Ayantan Chowdhury
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CHENNAI: Namdhari XI is one of the most unique hockey sides in the country. They are easily recognisable with their spotless white turbans and uniform. All members are strictly vegetarian and inspired by the warrior spirit prevalent in the sect. They believe in giving everything on the pitch and having no regrets. The passion is infectious.

The 1975 World Cup triumph led to the birth of the Namdhari XI. Since then, they have enjoyed a lot of success — at both national and international level. They have gifted the national squad quite a few players, including Malak Singh, Gurmail Singh and current captain Sardar Singh.

Action from the match between Namdhari XI (white) and Karnataka Hockey on Friday Coach of the side, Didar Singh, who represented the Tricolour at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, spoke at length about the side. “Earlier, the dress code used to be very strict, with all players having to wear ‘Kachera’. Now the rules have been relaxed, with players wearing shorts. But we still insist on the traditional attire during local tournaments,” he told Express.

Currently taking part in the 89th All-India MCC Murugappa Gold Cup, the entire contingent made sure to follow

all rules of their religion. “We’ve bought our own cook and only have that food. Milk products are our main source of nutrition,” Didar added. Sponsored by Namdhari Seeds, a multi-national corporation based in Bengaluru, the team participates in more than 10 tournaments around the year. “Surrey Cup, Canada and Cal Cup, US are some competitions we take part in internationally,” the 51-year-old revealed.

“Everyone in our village is a hockey fanatic. You won’t find kids playing cricket there. We catch young kids with potential and start training them in our own nursery academy.

“If they prove to be good enough, they are then sent to Namdhari’s centre of excellence — at Bhaini Sahib in Ludhiana — where they hone their skills on synthetic turf. Sports hostel equipped with all modern facilities, including air-conditioned halls and a multi-gym, are also there. Former CM of Haryana, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, had promised a new synthetic turf will be delivered to us for our local academy. It’s ready to be delivered,” the coach noted.

Didar rues the lack of proper government support despite their service to the sport in the country. “Hockey India has done no favours to us. Players used to leave our squad after getting job offers in other departments. We’ve started age-group training to make sure our squad is always full. Santa Singh, a junior international, is our next gift to the hockey fraternity,” Didar signed off.

Results

Karnataka Hockey 3 (Thimanna PN 18th, 39th) vs Namdhari XI (Gagandeep Singh 6th, Bhagat Singh 48th, Udhampreet Singh

59th). SAIL 1 (Santosh Majhi 66th) vs Punjab & Sind Bank 4 (Vikramjit Singh 21st, Gauthampal Singh 33rd, Karamjit Singh 38th, Pabhdeep Singh 43rd). Army XI 4 (Siraju AP 7th, 10th, Chandan Aind 29th, Rajinesh Salaria 44th) vs Indian Railways 3 (Mayank James 18th, 54th, Malak Singh 69th).

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http://www.dnaindia.com/sport/report-churning-out-talent-the-namdhari-way-2123993

Hockey team from Haryana's Sant Nagar expects players to eat vegetarian food, wear traditional clothes

Friday, 11 September 2015 - Mumbai

Churning out talent the Namdhari way

The Namdhari XI hockey team has produced many an international player. They are in the city to take part in the MHAL Super Division League *Salman Ansari dna*

It wasn't tough to notice a group of Sikhs in orange shirts and white turbans sitting at the Wankhede corner of the MHAL Stadium on Thursday. Keeping a watchful eye on the game between **Indian Navy**and Abhi Foundation in the **Mumbai Super Division League** encounter were the Namdhari XI. What makes these men from Haryana special? Having produced the likes of Indian hockey captain Sardar Singh, **Malak Singh** and Gurmail Singh, to name a few, the Namdharis can stake claim to being the one of the top hockey academies in the country.

A reason for their success can be attributed to how the religious values of the Namdhari sect dictate many aspects of their lives including hockey. Hailing from Sant Nagar, Sarsa (a district in Haryana), each member of the squad is a strict vegetarian and has to wear a white turban and kacchas under his shorts while playing. If that's not enough, they carry their local cook with them to each tournament they go to.

Proving testament to the fact was none other than the team's manager Didar Singh, who represented India at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, the first from Sarsa to play for the country.

Didar is decked from head to toe in a white kurta pajama and turban. "It's a price you pay to be the best. Every kid who comes to the academy knows what he is getting into. We don't compromise here. The players can't play in their kacchas but we make sure they wear them under the shorts. Our cook, Gurdev Singh, has been with us since 2000. We don't even have eggs. Our diet is full of milk and ghee," said Singh.

It was the 1975 World Cup triumph that led Thakur Udhay Singh, now head of the sect, to promote the game in the village. A year later, the Namdhari XI was formed with a training centre built at the village school. Since then, a youngster, after honing his basic skills at the village academy, is shifted to Namdhari's

centre of excellence at Bhaini Sahib in Ludhiana, which boasts of an astro-turf and a sports hostel.

Gurcharan Singh is the team coach but he isn't just that. The 30-year-old former India national was also present Indian team captain Sardar Singh's batch mate at the Ludhiana academy.

> "Hockey in Sarsa generates as much craze as cricket in Mumbai. Almost every household has a kid or has had someone who's played hockey.

> "We don't have to send our scouts to the schools. Parents in these 18 Namdhari villages know that the likes of Sardar, Gurmail and Malak have started young and have gone all the way to playing at Bhaini Sahib. What else do the parents want? We pick kids from Class six and take care of all their needs. They don't have to pay a single penny," said Gurcharan.

Bhagat Singh Dhillon, at 22, may be one of the youngest in the team. But having been enrolled as a 12-year-old at Baini Saheb, he counts himself as the most experienced.

“We don’t have to come to Mumbai and play in big tournaments to learn things like team spirit and family. Staying at the Namdhari academy for years helps us develop deep rooted comaraderie.

“That’s why it’s important to start young and stay together. It makes a big difference on the turf. The academy back home has a huge gallery where you see pictures of Sardar and all the players who played for India. As a kid, there was nothing more that I could ask for,” said the full-back.

With the side playing their first game against Abhi Foundation on Saturday, Didar said he can’t wait to see his side display their “Punjabi aggressiveness”. “The way we train makes sure there is a fire in the

belly. We train three hours in the morning, three hours in the evening. Then, we have the strict diet and dress code. All these things instill a lot of discipline in the boys.

"That's a reason why you see so many players from north India represent the country. The way we train makes sure there is a fire in the belly. That's why the boys aren't sleeping at the MHAL hostel and are here watching the team that they will face in two days' time," added the 52-year-old.

Players from Namdhari XI to play for India: Didar Singh Sr, Harpal Singh, Sardar Singh, Didar Singh, Malak Singh, Gurmail Singh, Gurcharan Singh, Shivender Singh, Ajmer Singh, Daljit Singh, Nanak Singh, Avtar Singh, Kabul Singh, Raghubir Singh